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Sierra Tarascans

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BEVERAGES

272 Milk is drunk to a limited extent in season by those few who have cattle. If purchased, it is used mostly for cooking.[18]

Te de naranja is sometimes drunk. It is made by steeping the leaves of a particular member of the citrus family, either fresh or dried. The leaves must be imported in Cherán. In some other villages this is a regular breakfast drink, but in Cherán it is only an occasional drink.

Coffee is rarely drunk by the Tarascans. Most stores in Cherán do not carry it at all.

Aqua miel (urapi, urápiti, "white"), the unfermented juice of the maguey or *Agave americana*, is liked by some but is not very popular. It is usually available in quantities only in May. It is often drunk with sections of peeled orange, pieces of chile, and sliced onions sprinkled with ground red chile and salt. Fermented *pulque* is not at all popular, and what little is produced is mostly sent to Uruapan.

[273]

Aguardiente (čaránda) is the most common drink. This is simply unflavored sugarcane gin.

Amargo, a popular Cherán drink, is made by putting ground cinnamon bark, sugar, lemon juice, and lemon rind in a bottle of *aguardiente* for 2 or 3 days. It is taken before breakfast as a remedy in certain diseases (*reumas, bilis, espantos*).

[757]

263 Honey is produced to some extent. It is used mostly in making *atole blanco* or white atole and also as a treat for the children.

SOME FIESTA FOODS

262 Čápata is made by grinding black amaranth into dough and mixing with brown sugar. The blackish paste is spread on banana leaves. It is sold without cooking.

[556] Mole of squash seeds is a luxury dish made only by the most wealthy and by the *carguero* of Natividad (Christmas). The sauce is made of ground squash seeds, *chile ancho*, tomatoes, spices, and bread for thickening. Beef or pork is the meat served in the sauce.

[273] Beer is sold in some stores, but it is not a common drink.

[234] [18] In Chilchota no cheese or butter is made. Local milk is drunk or made into jojóke, milk thickened by heating. Cheese, butter, and other milk products are imported.

845 inside was foam like the boiling turpentine. By giving the mother medicines the delivery succeeded, but the child's skin broke easily and inside was foam. The more bizarre aspects of this account may be discounted, but some factual basis probably existed.

Another case reported was a child born with the "head all hollow." Yet another had eyes "as though gouged out with a knife" and only the rudiments of a nose. Both children were [821] born dead. The phenomena were attributed to an eclipse. Few cases occur in which the mother has died without delivery being accomplished, but still-births are more frequent. Strangling with the cord is said to occur in some cases. Birth of children with clubfoot (said to be caused by the mother not taking care of herself) and blind children (caused by God's will) are both known. No hunchbacks were reported. One other case where the child's arm emerged first was reported; the child died but the mother lived. Animal births are mentioned also. Only one case accompanied by severe hemorrhage was reported.

[805] Children born in May are said to be mischievous and courageous, those born in February to be half crazy.

846 After the birth of the child the mother stays in bed from 8 to 15 days. At the conclusion of this time she bathes and gets up, but remains under food taboos and spends some time reclining during the next 5 days, when she bathes again and may go out of the house. The midwife visits the mother daily until she gets out of bed, massaging her. When the mother can walk, she begins to do small tasks. Full resumption of tasks is not undertaken until the termination of the food restrictions, about 40 days after birth. Some women do not go out of the house until 3 weeks have passed. After the mother has gotten out of bed, the midwife [278] may still massage her with unguents, either coconut oil or white lily. During the period the mother should not be left alone, so she will not be frightened or visited by an evil spirit. Usually the mother is cared for after birth by the husband's mother, by her own mother, or some female relative. Wealthier families, though, may hire someone to assist.

846 One case of what was probably a postpartur-
757 ient infection was recorded. The midwife

846 bathed the infected parts with *yerba de cáncer*.
757 The entire herb was boiled and then hydrogen peroxide was added to the brew. Two treatments daily for 2 months finally cured the patient.

834 Husband and wife do not resume sexual
846 relations until at least 35 days after the birth; in most cases the period is 40 days. Husbands are sometimes said to behave badly in connection with the first pregnancy; they have "whims" and "weariness," probably a polite way of saying that they resent the loss of sexual privileges and the lessened attentions of their wives. Some go with other women.

844 Shortly after the delivery the mother is given
262 her first food. This may be chocolate, milk, and a bit of bread. Some midwives give the mother *rafino* or coffee but others prefer white atole "because it strengthens the blood." A chicken may be killed the same day and put on to cook to make broth to be served to the mother the following day. Oatmeal is also a favorite food for the mother in the early days. Broth from beef is prohibited but broth from mutton is permitted during the first week. The second week, additional foods may be taken, but nothing "cold." Tortillas may be eaten after the second day. In general, pork, chile, fish, and beans are forbidden for from 3 weeks to 40 days. Fruit and vegetable greens must be eaten sparingly in the latter part of the period, not at all in the early part. There is no restriction on salt. Beef is apparently forbidden only in the first week; cheese is mentioned as a permitted food by some. In some cases the mother is fed the atole known as kágwash kamáta for several days after birth. In view of the general agreement that chile is forbidden, probably this ingredient is left out when the atole is made for mothers. According to some, the midwife stays on the same diet as the mother until the time of the mother's first bath.

844 Fathers have virtually no restrictions. The only one discovered is that he should not kill poisonous snakes. If he does, the newborn infant may have bloody discharges from nose and mouth. The cure is to catch a rat, remove the intestines, add to them some *rosas de castilla* and a few grains of *tequisquite* and place on the child's stomach.

753 are recognized as of mechanical origin. Some diseases are vaguely regarded as of natural causation and as possibly contagious; others are clearly of supernatural character even though curable by natural means, although the line between the two is not sharp. In either case, herbs, unguents, and drugs are believed capable of helping the sickness. To utilize these methods of curing requires no special ability but merely knowledge. Many minor ailments are treated at home; the curer is merely a 759 person of greater knowledge who is called in when home remedies fail or the case is obviously beyond the knowledge of the household. Similarly, the doctor at Parácho is called only when the curer fails or the case is believed beyond the curer's powers. Obviously, this situation has not greatly enhanced the reputation of the doctor, for most of his patients are nearly moribund some hours before he can reach them.

757 Curers usually make a diagnosis first. No information on methods could be secured. It appears that a visual inspection and questioning of the patients are parts of the diagnosis, and possibly the only diagnosis. Once the diagnosis is made, the curer decides what steps to take to cure the patient. Often herbs kept on hand can be used; others, however, must be specially sought because they must be collected either fresh or at certain hours of the day.

753 In general, sickness by some is related to the strength of the blood which resides below the [826] nape of the neck. This is also the location of the individual's life. Persons with much blood are healthy. When persons are seriously ill, it is because their blood is scanty; when there is insufficient to nourish the "seat of life," the person dies. There are also vague concepts of sickness being caused by "heat" or "cold," (sophisticated Agustín attributed a cold to drinking water while sweating) "airs" (which may also be either hot or cold), fright (*espanto*), and, much more specific, evil eye.

752 Broken bones are treated by specialists, who [759] may also be curers of diseases or, in one case at least, midwives. The bones are manipulated into place and bound to splints without other treatment.

Dislocations are massaged repeatedly with olive oil until the bones are back in place. They

752 are then covered with belladonna leaves. Bruises are sometimes cured by splitting a lizard and applying it to the injured place.

Hernia is recognized as being from natural causes through lifting heavy weights. One curer treats the ailments with massage with oils. The patient also takes medicine made by collecting all the kinds of alcoholic drinks the curer can find, such as *charanda*, sherry, etc., and mixing them together. The patient takes a third to a half cup of the mixture every morning before breakfast.

757 Headache, ép'ameráni, is extremely common and is ordinarily treated with home remedies. A patch of some herb (or of adhesive plaster or court plaster bought in the stores) is applied to each temple. Some people wear these patches almost constantly, especially some women.

753 *Bilis*, bile, is one of the commonest diseases, especially among children; it also is one of the 757 most difficult to define. Often the vaguest of symptoms are attributed to *bilis*. Lassitude, especially in young persons, often is diagnosed as *bilis*. According to one curer, however, the patient turns yellow, seems tired, and develops sores similar to those of smallpox. Three causes are given for *bilis*, air in the stomach from waiting too long for a meal, not getting enough to eat and so getting air in the stomach, and getting air in the stomach from any other cause. Children are sometimes born with *bilis* and are thought to become infected in the womb. Treatments of *bilis* are vague. *Flor de pila* well cooked with cinnamon, and given by the teaspoon as a tonic, and an infusion of *simonillo* are two remedies. *Amargo* (see below) is another remedy.

Stomach pains are also regarded as being caused by air, either hot or cold. *Basa*, a pain on either side, is also caused by air, or by drinking too much water. *Espinocilla*, a red-flowered plant, is good for both these afflictions. Nopal leaves are put on the soles of the feet for too much heat in the stomach. (See below for account of a cure of one of the members of the staff.)

Itch or mange, *sarna*, súta, is treated with unguents purchased in the drug store, polvo Juan and mercuric ointment.

Heart trouble, *latido de corazón*, is recognized from pains in the heart and by palpita-

753 tions. There is a high fever, a cough, and sometimes the patient spits blood. The patient
757 is rubbed with oil of seven different flowers, bought in the drug store, and given an infusion of sunflowers, spines from the tejecote tree, prickly pear, chayote, and dry white and red maize leaves. The infusion is taken several times a day in place of water. The disease may be caused if the person arrives somewhere very agitated and drinks cold water or something cold, *fresca*. One informant thought eating lice was good for heart trouble.

752 Piles, *almorranas*, are cured with a remedy
753 made with copper sulfate and lard washed with vinegar, unguent of serato, and drying salve (*pomada secante*). One of the assistants was told confidentially, and as a thing not to be passed on, that cauterization with a hot iron was also employed.

753 Erysipelas, čarápiti, appears with a high fever, which increases. There is angry red
757 swelling and much pain. The cause given is allowing the clothing to dry on the body if one becomes soaked; the disease is also an accompaniment of wounds. The patient is given a cooked infusion of *yerba de cancer* and asked to eat only milk, sago, and orange-leaf tea.

753 Salmoneda is a disease of small children;
755 they fall down in fits. The cause is fright, *espanto*, and the disease is cured by burning copal and having the child inhale the smoke.

753 Smallpox, kuarósikua, occurs every March.
757 There are 3 days of fever, 3 days of cough and fever accompanied by breaking out of the pustules, 3 days of feeding to regain strength. After the sixth day the pustules begin to dry up. Possibility of contagion from using the same cup, spoon, etc., is recognized. The stage accompanied by the cough is treated with burro's milk (application not clear) and a common herb occurring on the streets, ɕákua peréně. The latter is boiled and drunk instead of water.

Sarampión, measles, usually occurs in March also and is regarded as much more dangerous than smallpox (although this may be true, it seems more likely that the identification of diseases is faulty). The patients get a red rash, fever, and colds. An infusion of grapefruit (?) is used to bring out the rash; if the rash does not come out the patient may not

753 recover. Some curers wash their hands in
757 alcohol when treating *sarampión* to prevent
[751] catching the infection.

Whooping cough, perénsjuk (*tosferina*), is a very common disease, with a high mortality rate among children. Burro's milk, turpentine, copal, and *yerba buena* are used in treatment.

Syphilis, gonorrhea, diphtheria, and tuberculosis are either unknown or their existence in Cherán is denied. Most of the previously described diseases are recognized as infections by some curers; other diseases are not so considered.

Toothache seems always to be treated by patent medicines bought in drug stores at Uruapan or Purépero. One man said he had heard that letting of blood from the gums was done in the past, but the practice has been abandoned.

Goiter, kuɛ́kua, is fairly common in Cherán, especially among females. It is regarded as a disease. Patients are bathed up to the knees with hot water to make the "heat" come down. Alcohol is then applied to the bottoms of the feet to make the "heat" stay down.

An extremely common disease, especially for children in the dry season, is dysentery, *posición*, usually accompained by high fever. Lard is washed with clean water. When the water is evaporated, a half centavo of sodium bicarbonate is mixed with the lard and the stomach is rubbed with the mixture.

Fevers are said to be very common, but there are few standard treatments. A well-known, herb, *romero*, is much used. A blue-flowered plant called *sadadrón* is also employed. Pneumonia and rheumatism are recognized, but, again, there are no standard treatments. Typhus in mild form has occurred in epidemics, but no treatment could be learned.

Pains are regarded as a class of illness. When children have pains, *dolores*, the mother anoints the seat of the pain with saliva mixed with ashes. The water in which maize has been cooked, *nejallote*, is also given in small quantities. This water is also used as a remedy whenever anything "fresh" (*fresco*) is needed. Women after birth are especially subject to pains of the breast, k'uaningiota. The pains may be in the breast, about the stomach region, or anywhere about the ribs. Sometimes

753 swellings occur in the breast, ribs, or back.
757 A curer specializing in this ailment discovers the seat of the pain by feeling with her fingers. She then anoints the area with unguents purchased in the stores. If the first ones do not work, she then tries others.

[826] The blood of animals is generally regarded as bad and dangerous. The black blood from a butchered animal will cause ulcers if it falls on the skin. The cure is to cauterize the ulcers with a hot iron. The danger from animal blood is said to be the reason many people will not use meat until several days after butchering.

757 There are a number of treatments of illness
278 which are quite generalized, that is, they may be used on a variety of occasions. For example, *amargo*, is taken in the morning before eating to cure rheumatism, *bilis*, and "fright." *Amargo* is *aguardiente* in which cinnamon bark, sugar, lemon juice, and lemon rind have been steeped for 2 or 3 days. Roses of castile, made into infusions, may be used for any sort of pain or sickness. Persons on the verge of death may sometimes be brought back by putting an onion under their nose or blowing tobacco smoke in their face. A mild diet is frequently used regardless of the illness. Milk and oatmeal gruel are the two most preferred items. Nuríte, a common herb used in cooking, is also widely used for stomach disorders and colics. *Romero, quién sabe,* and *yerba buena* are also widely used herbs. Additional herbal remedies have been collected, but the plants have not yet been identified.

753 Of considerable interest is a class of diseases
754 and ailments which seem to be of supernatural causation. Witchcraft, which has already been discussed (p. 156), is an important cause of illness and death. Others are č'érpiri or jándaku íri ("fright," *espanto*), tariáta pákata ("wind," *aire* or *viento*), and éskukata (evil eye or *mal de ojo*).

753 Some informants believed that "fright" was
755 something attacking only drunkards and persons who went about at night, and considered it merely seeing ghosts or similar imaginary supernatural things. A curer, however, described to Rendón an elaborate treatment for the disease. The curer puts a bit of cotton over the end of the index finger of her right hand. Over this she puts a green tomato, preferably